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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/CM, INR/B, INR/EAP, EUR/WE

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SUBJECT: Guangzhou's Bishop Not Optimistic about Future of
Beijing-Vatican Relations

11. (U) Classified by Consul General Robert Goldberg for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

12. (C) "We should not be optimistic" about relations
between the Vatican and Beijing, according to Bishop of
Guangzhou Monsignor Gan Junqiu. During an hour-long
private meeting March 14, Gan predicted to the French
Consul General in Guangzhou -- who subsequently recounted
the meeting to the Consul General -- that religious freedom
in China would not be absolute, and that Beijing would
continue its opposition to nominations of Catholic priests
made by the Pope.

For Beijing, Not All Roads Lead to Rome

13. (C) The Pope appointed Gan as Bishop of Guangzhou
December 30, 2006, but the ceremony did not take place
until December 4, 2007, nearly two weeks after the original
date of November 21 approved by Beijing. Gan said that
personal disagreements with China's official Patriotic
Church over who would attend the ceremony and a letter from
the Pope addressing the Christian community in China
contributed to the delay. He also indirectly admitted that
his oath of allegiance to the Pope could have been a factor
complicating his nomination, according to the French
diplomat. (Note: contemporary media reports suggested that
a planned papal meeting with the Dalai Lama had derailed
Gan's installment, the event receiving Beijing's blessing
only after high-level talks with the Vatican and a
subsequent public announcement that the Pope did not plan
to meet with the Tibetan leader.)

A Blessing on Thy House (Church)

14. (C) Gan said that groups of parishioners -- especially
migrant workers who find the logistics of church attendance
difficult to manage -- sometimes ask him for permission to
hold mass themselves, to which he agrees under the
condition that it be held discreetly. Because of this
system, Gan said that there was essentially no underground
network of Catholic congregations in his diocese.
(Comment: Chinese authorities would likely view such small
gatherings as problematic and "unauthorized," thus the need
for discretion.)

Biographical Notes

15. (SBU) The French Consul General assessed Gan, who was 44
at the time of the December ceremony, as "a person worth
knowing," who is "very straight forward" and does not hide

his loyalty to the Pope. Gan's adopted non-Chinese name is Joseph.

¶6. (U) According to media reports, Bishop Gan Junqiu graduated from a Catholic seminary in Henan in 1982 and was ordained a priest in 1991. He was transferred to the Guangzhou diocese in 2002, where he is highly regarded by laymen and clergy alike.

GOLDBERG